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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 002869

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI AND G/TIP; LONDON FOR GOLDRICH

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: GOK OBJECTS TO TIP "COMPARISON" TO OTHER GULF STATES; PDAS CHENEY OUTLINES STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE RANKING

REF: A. KUWAIT 2803

[B](#). KUWAIT 2618

[C](#). KUWAIT 2551 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary and comment: During her June 25 visit to Kuwait, NEA PDAS Cheney emphasized the need to make progress in dealing with the trafficking in persons (TIP) issue. Three senior officials voiced GOK disappointment with the 2005 report. The new Minister of Planning, the Foreign Minister, and the senior Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister all complained that Kuwait was unfairly compared to other Gulf countries -- Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE -- and said the report failed to address efforts underway to improve the working conditions for expatriate laborers. PDAS Cheney emphasized that countries were assessed independently and said the goal of the report was to identify areas for improvement, not to punish or embarrass. She highlighted the 60-day period for action and recommended the GOK consider action against stables that use child camel jockeys and take steps to prosecute those who exploit foreign workers. She stated the U.S. commitment to working with Kuwait on TIP issues and advised the officials of G/TIP's interest in visiting Kuwait. The Ambassador reiterated the need for real action not the formation of committees. Post has repeatedly raised TIP issues with senior GOK officials, and the chorus of comments to PDAS Cheney makes clear that the report and U.S. concerns have gotten the Government's attention, although the perceived comparison to other Gulf states is the biggest concern. FM Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said the Prime Minister would discuss TIP issues during his July 1 visit; PDAS Cheney stressed that the visit is an opportunity to elaborate on the measures taken to improve working conditions for expatriate laborers. End summary and comment.

[2](#). (C) NEA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Cheney began her visit to Kuwait with a call on Kuwait's first female minister, Dr. Maasouma Al-Mubarak, Minister of Planning and Administrative Development. Following a discussion on women's political participation and strategies to prepare women for the 2007 parliamentary elections (septel), Dr. Maasouma changed the subject and expressed her deep disappointment with the 2005 Trafficking in persons (TIP) Report. She acknowledged problems in Kuwait in treating expatriate workers, especially domestic staff, but strongly objected to Kuwait being "lumped in with other states" and said the report did not take into account ongoing efforts to improve labor conditions. In particular, in her assessment, the report did not address steps by individuals and NGOs to address trafficking issues. She said, "things are different in Kuwait" and the Department's report did not reflect the Kuwaiti system for "identifying and rectifying mistakes." She referred to the recent ban on outside work between noon and 4:00 PM and said the GOK was determined to make working conditions more humane for the approximate 450,000 domestics in Kuwait. She reported court cases filed against several companies which violated the ban and lamented that a few abuses would sully the image of Kuwait. She further advised that reform of the labor law was underway and commented that as a cabinet minister, she now had greater access and influence and would press for positive changes.

[3](#). (C) Similarly, Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister Dr. Yousef Al-Ebrahim, objected to being compared to neighboring states and questioned the methods and sources used in preparing the report. He asserted that Kuwait was "not like the rest of the Gulf" and was committed to treating South Asians resident in Kuwait well. He said the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor had banned the use of child camel jockeys, a practice he said was nonexistent in Kuwait, but was limited in taking action against those who use their own children in camel races. In response to a comment by the Ambassador on non-payment of some workers, he claimed Kuwait had 1.5 million foreign workers and only a small number of them were not being paid, and firms were being sanctioned. Blaming the media for the negative image, he said Kuwait's free press was quick to report on worker complaints and such news was often repeated, suggesting a widespread problem. He asserted that many reports of abuse were "blown out of

proportion" or simply false, and complained that retractions and corrections never made the papers.

14. (C) In a separate meeting, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah also expressed his disappointment with the TIP report and restated that Kuwait was very different from its neighboring countries. He reported the GOK, NGOs, Parliament's Human Rights Committee, and individuals were all working to improve the status of Kuwait's expatriate labor force. He asserted the GOK's resolve to respond to the report's criticisms and said the Prime Minister would likely raise the issue while in Washington.

15. (C) PDAS Cheney responded to all three interlocutors that the 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act was very specific and countries were evaluated independently and objectively, not against others. She emphasized that the goal of the report was to identify areas for improvement, and thus Kuwait's ranking could be improved. She added that progress on TIP was essential to continued progress toward a free trade agreement. She stressed that following the Tier 3 ranking, Kuwait has 60 days to take immediate action so that ranking could be reconsidered by the President. She suggested as possible measures shutting down stables that use child camel jockeys or prosecuting individuals who exploit foreign workers. She further informed the GOK officials of the interest of Department officials from the G/TIP office in visiting Kuwait to discuss these issues. She said the Prime Minister's July 1 visit to the U.S. presented an opportunity to elaborate on concrete steps to combat TIP. The Ambassador said the U.S. appreciated the additional attention the GOK paid to TIP issues, but stressed the need for action, not the formation of committees and issuance of reports. He encouraged better coordination among the involved ministries -- Social Affairs and Labor, Foreign Affairs, and Interior -- and suggested that Kuwaiti Ambassador to the U.S. work closely with Department officials.

16. (U) PDAS Cheney cleared this message.

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